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Sculptural Vessels Across the Great Divide:

Tony Cragg's *Laibe* and the metaphors of clay

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Abstract

This article discusses Tony Cragg's *Laibe* (1991) in the context of fine and applied arts practice of the time. Just as many British crafts practitioners were concerned with using the vessel as an iconic starting point to explore sculptural ideas, Cragg's *Laibe*, which conflates the vessel form with the suggestion of loaves of cut bread, brings together the necessities for sustaining life in a metaphoric use of form and material. The obvious hand marks while using industrial clay, at once suggests the long history of thrown pots as well as contemporary practices. Like many artists who have used clay as part of a broader range of materials, Cragg collaborated with a ceramicist, in his case during a residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands. *Laibe* was shown in *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley* (2004), and the article discusses the critical and exhibiting distancing of art from craft, in spite of the overlaps of concerns.

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Introduction

In 2004 Tony Cragg exhibited an example from his series of related sculptures called *Laibe* in *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley* at Tate Liverpool. This work, which dates from 1991, represents both an early interest in the ceramic medium and an example of how he used the vessel form as a metaphorical starting point to engage the viewer in ideas about the ways in which humans relate to their environment. However, the coming together of clay and vessel creates tensions, not only within art dialogues, but also between art and craft. Unlike other contemporary works included in the exhibition, such as those by Cindy Sherman or Richard Slee, the surfaces of *Laibe* are not used for imagery, are not clothed in a skin of glaze, and do not incorporate wit or irony. The four related vessels that make up the sculpture have obviously been raised on a wheel and the material qualities are intrinsic to their meaning. However, this work, as with the aims of the exhibition, is not about potting or studio vessels, but uses the vessel form within an artistic framework.

Tony Cragg's *Laibe* was only one of many vessels in the exhibition. From Gauguin's *Hina and Tefatou* (1893), which falls within

the continuum of his overall oeuvre that depicts mythic scenes related to the folk culture of Tahiti, to Jeff Koon's *Puppy Vase* (1998), which is an ironical sideways glance at decorative and sentimental pottery objects, vessels were shown to have played an important part in artistic production over the twentieth century (Groom 2004). This idea had also been explored in an earlier exhibition held in Holland – *The Unexpected. Artists' Ceramics of the 20th Century* (Koplos 1998). This international exhibition, which highlighted the ceramic collection of the Kruithuis at 's-Hertogenbosch, was narrower in its remit. Unlike *A Secret History of Clay* (2004), which included performances and works that were destroyed during and after the exhibition, the objects exhibited at the Kruithuis were self contained and many were vessels that linked to other facets in the artists' oeuvre. Like *A Secret History of Clay* studio makers were hardly mentioned, although the vessel was a key theme. What is interesting in the titles of both of these exhibitions is the degree to which both highlighted the importance of clay in twentieth century art, while acknowledging its historical ambivalence within critical dialogues. What is also worth noting is the fact that many of the artists were reliant on the skills of craftsmen in order to advise on technical and material possibilities and to help make the works.

Contemporary with *Laibe* were a number of English exhibitions that highlighted craft practitioners who were moving

beyond the idea of the vessel as something comforting or utilitarian. *The Abstract Vessel: Ceramics in Studio* (1991) exclusively featured studio ceramicists who were making sculptural vessels (Houston 1991). Like the essays included in the catalogue for *Beyond the Dovetail: Craft, Skill and Imagination* of the same year, the role of the vessel in the post-industrial age – when ‘honest potting’ can be seen as nostalgic, when skills that had traditionally conferred status can be easily produced mechanically, and when most craft practitioners have been through higher education and therefore engage with broad artistic debates – was discussed (Frayling 1991). Unlike the catalogues related to *A Secret History of Clay* and *The Unexpected. Artists’ Ceramics of the 20th Century*, the texts for these craft exhibitions and others like *The Raw and Cooked. New Work in Clay in Britain* (1993), engaged with the genre history and moved beyond that to make links with art and its related philosophies (Elliott 1993). As Martina Margetts wrote in her essay for the latter exhibition, the developments in art during the late 1980s and 1990s had led to the role of ceramics being more open to interpretation and connection. She argued that process as product, which was important within both craft ceramics and the sculptural production of artists like Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon and Anish Kapoor, meant that there were close affinities, especially in relation to vessel forms, across the genres (Margetts 1993: 13–15).

However, these links were not discussed within the art journals. There were reviews and articles about *A Secret History of Clay* in the magazines *Crafts*, *World of Interiors*, *Ceramics* (Australia) and *Ceramic Review*, but none in art journals. The exhibitions related to craft ceramics were not reviewed outside craft journals. In the article for *Crafts* about *A Secret History of Clay*, Tanya Harrod makes the point that if one looks back over the last half century, it is possible to trace a more inclusive history of art than is normally considered (Harrod 2004: 29). Although there is a rich history of artists making works that could be considered 'craft', including ceramic works, by the 1940s Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer had chosen to ignore this. This exclusion from and exclusiveness of the allowed history of art is a recent phenomena, but what the works in the exhibition revealed was the diversity of reasons for using the material (Harrod 2004: 32). As the preview in *Ceramic Review* articulated, the aim of the exhibition was to prove that 'clay is a central art' (O. R. 2004: 17). However, the ambiguity of the status of clay has meant that many artists have found it necessary to distance this work from the craft genre. Edward Lucie-Smith's (2004) article about *A Secret History of Clay* in *Ceramic Review* starts with the pronouncements made by Anthony Gormley in the catalogue about the differences between art and craft. Whereas art, Gormley states, questions the

world and complicates things, craft objects reconcile the needs of human life and the environment. Gormley was unhappy about the state of craft at the time, considering that it had both lost its function and, that in aspiring to be sculpture, vessels were being made that were unsuitable for holding flowers (Gormley 2004: 84). As Lucie-Smith dryly commented, this ambiguous position also held true for many similar works by artists (Lucie-Smith 2004: 32). What Gormley, as well as many other artists have tended to forget is the long history that craft has of being linked to social and political events and of being for display. Clearly, as Grayson Perry has articulated, the proximity of ceramics to art makes it a threat, in the way that even distant areas of art do not represent. As he said, 'if you call your pot art you're being pretentious. If you call a shark art you're being bold and philosophical' (Groom 2004: 14).

What *A Secret History of Clay*, along with other exhibitions of the 1990s and 2000s revealed was the importance of clay and the vessel as a means of exploring ideas right through the twentieth century. This became even more obvious during the 1980s and 1990s, when both cutting edge craft practitioners and those affiliated with New British Sculpture made vessels in many different materials and forms. Some, like *Laibe* are solid and just suggest a vessel. Some use the containing space to suggest ideas. Some suggest links to

architectural ideas or reference iconic works like Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917).

The generation of artists and ceramicists that emerged from the RCA (Royal College of Art) and other London art schools during the 1970s, of which Cragg was one, had been educated in similar ways, knew each other and have remained loosely connected. Their work does reveal affinities. It is not my intention to investigate the relative statuses of art and craft. That has been considered repeatedly over the last few decades. However, through discussing just one of Cragg's sculptures – *Laibe* – and placing it within a broader framework of vessel forms of the time, I intend to cast some light on the shifting relationships between different practices.

Laibe

Laibe is, on the face of it, atypical of Cragg's work. It is not made up of a collection of found or transformed vessels. There is no containing inside. There are no contrasting elements and the surface maps the maker's process. However, I have chosen it because in spite of these apparent differences, it also represents a coming together of many of Cragg's ideas, and the fact that it was exhibited at *A Secret History of Clay* placed it alongside the work of other contemporary artists and, by comparison, reveals much about its artistic context.

Laibe, like others in the series, consists of four solid, unglazed ceramic vessel shapes, arranged into a still life. The original vessels were thrown, with the traces of the potter's fingers remaining mapped into the surface. Each of the components had been sliced, and through the visible pull of the knife through clay together with the outward sag of the slices, the consistency and malleability of the material is evident. The manganese oxide that was added to the fine grained sculpture clay resulted in this work being brown – others in the series are pale. The vessels were fired at a low temperature, meaning that the earth qualities – in spite of being industrially treated – remain (Reijnders 2005: 152).

Cragg has written that his works are intended as propositions rather than dogmatic statements. He wants to create objects that 'don't exist in the natural or functional world', but that can reflect and transmit information and feelings about the world (Cragg 1985: 60). The fact that his sculptures are not meant to be functional is key, especially when considering his works that incorporate references to function, like his vessels or arrangements of furniture. He argues that art is unique in that it does not belong to a particular utilitarian power system that deadens people's responses to everyday life through promoting the consumption of banal, mediocre objects (Cragg 1992: 72–73). For him, in order to express the environment there needs to be a different level of responsibility to making things (Cragg 1988: 63).

Art, he feels, occupies a special category of objects that offers itself as 'complex symbols for new experiences' (Cragg 1985: 59).

The concept that the objects are about, but separate from the everyday world, and are non-functional, propositional and symbolic, are relevant when considering all of Cragg's work, but especially so when considering *Laibe*. Like so many of his sculptures, it is complexly layered, so that the initial suggestion of four vessels is complicated by their being solid and sliced. '*Laibe*' is German for loaves. The quality and variety of German bread is legendary, but beyond that bread, like vessels and clay, has metaphoric, cultural and ritual resonances, as well as being vital for sustaining life. The very fact of the vessels being so obviously raised on a wheel references the millions of pots that have been made in this way over the thousands of years since the wheel was first invented. The forms of *Laibe*, are what Perry would call 'classical invisible', in being not related to any particular time or culture, but they provide a base that people can understand (Boot 2002: 14). Through this non-determinacy, possible interpretations are left open. While the hand marks and clay surface suggest artisan skills, this is not intended to be a nostalgic reference, nor is it meant to promote a direct link between maker and user in the manner of, for instance, vessels from the Muchelney Pottery or those espoused by Octavio Paz (Paz 1974: 21). Although the elements suggest a link back through time, the slicing (sliced bread) and the industrially

produced clay suggest an engagement with contemporary life and commercial production.

In *A Secret History of Clay*, the last room included postmodern ceramics, like *Madame de Pompadour (Née Poisson)* *Soup Tureen and Saucer* (Cindy Sherman, 1989–91), *Brooms* (Richard Slee, 1999) and *Puppy Vase* (Jeff Koons, 1998). In a manner that would have horrified Clement Greenberg, all were related to the domestic, and verged on kitsch in order to critique popular culture. All were highly finished with a skin of glaze, aping industrially produced ceramics and mocking consumer values. Ironically, the soup tureen and saucer, which was a pastiche of Sèvres wares, and was therefore about 'high' taste, was next to Slee's brooms, which were almost Disney-like in their conception and vocabularies. These were contrasted with Jeff Koons' shiny, oversized sentimental object that links back to industrially produced ornaments. It is the dominance of the image as opposed to the object in these works that connects them both with postmodernity and consumer culture, and which separates them from Cragg's contemporaneous work, which was shown in the preceding room along with sculptures by Richard Deacon and Richard Long. The work in both rooms was about contemporary culture, but was revealed in different ways.

Frederick Jameson's hostility to the cultural emphasis on visual imagery is owing to what he considers its end as being 'rapt

mindless fascination' (Jameson 1990: 1–2). This also echoes Cragg's stand against the banal and mediocre. *Laibe* represents the opposite of consuming passions. As a still life, it would come under the category that Norman Bryson would term 'rhopography': 'the unassuming material base of life', the overlooked in a world seduced by plenty (Bryson 1990: 61). It is a humble image that overturns perceived importance. Everyone needs to eat, and the vessel and bread are the basic requirements that are needed to satisfy hunger.

The use of gravity in deciding the final form, rather than the artist 'completing' the work, echoes the ideas of Robert Morris and the soft sculptures of Claes Oldenberg. Allowing the material to move and determine the final shape has become a feature of many contemporary artists' work, including that of David Nash and the wood turner Christian Burchard, but is also something that frequently occurs in Cragg's sculptures. *Wall Peg* (1985), for instance, links to the upright forms of *Minster* (1987), where contrasting circles of materials including rubber, stone, wood and metal, are piled into a spire shape, making a tension between the traditional craft involved in building cathedrals and the industrial, found, and manipulated layers. However, unlike *Minster*, *Wall Peg* is upended and flops out into the space of the gallery suggesting links with minimalism. Each element leans against its neighbour, waiting for gravity to finally pull it to the horizontal. However, *Laibe* is not made up of contrasting layers, but is a whole

that has been cut. Photographs of it drying show how the slices are moving outwards at the top, while they are held together at the bottom (Cragg 1993: 10). Unlike the rips and repairs in the work of Peter Voulkos – who was also exhibited at *A Secret History of Clay* – these cuts are not intended to critique the material. The material is just part of the vocabulary of meaning.

Skill

The use of the readymade in Cragg's work prior to the late 1980s meant that there was a distancing of the artist from the means of production. Joseph Kosuth's *Art after Philosophy* (1969) argued that the introduction of the readymade was the point at which traditional skills were finally stripped of past meaning, and where the chosen objects were no more than carriers of propositional content (Roberts 2007: 24). David Pye, writing at much the same time, articulated his anxiety about the loss of interest in workmanship. Without this knowledge of materials and their relevant techniques, the fullest expression and range of qualities cannot be exploited (Pye 1968: 1–3). This lack of tacit knowledge, he felt, represented a narrowing of possibilities. Certainly, clay is a complex medium that requires intimate knowledge about both the forming and the glazing and firing processes, which has meant that most artists who have used clay have relied on the skills of crafts practitioners to advise them. Gauguin, for instance, collaborated with Ernst Chaplet, Miró with

Artigas and Caro, Tapies and Chillida all worked with Hans Spinner (de Waal 2004: 51).

Materials have always been of central significance for Cragg. He uses a broad range, but rather than unmediated natural materials, they have all been modified or are man made, which, he feels, makes them integral with the physical, intellectual and emotional lives of men (Cragg 1985: 60). Until *Mittelschicht* (1984), his works were frequently found plastic fragments related to a specific area, which were arranged into a temporary composition. This sculpture was the turning point at which Cragg began to move back to studio production, where he could explore materials and their roles in making meaning (McEvelley 2003: 168). He felt that the Duchampian strategy of found objects was running out of steam, and that by the middle of the 1980s artists like Gilbert and George, Richard Long, and Joseph Beuys had reduced the difference between art and the everyday world to a critical extent. He wanted to return to the studio and try another strategy. Although this return to making could be seen as a retrograde gesture, Cragg decided to become engaged with it and break the rules on his own terms (Cragg 2003: 201).

With a return to studio practice, Cragg needed to develop his own skills and also draw on those of others. This delegation of manual processes, as well as receiving the advice of material experts, means that he gained the ability to take risks and exploit the potential of each

material. In order to develop skills and understanding in ceramic production, Cragg obtained a residency in 1990 and another in 1992 at the European Ceramic Work Centre, the EKWC, in the Netherlands. The stay in 1990 was a trial run in the earlier location in Heusden, when the centre was finding an identity for itself. The 1992 residency was at the new centre at 's-Hertogenbosch, where many artists have stayed to explore the artistic and technical possibilities of the material while assisted by expert technicians (Reijnders 2005: 10). Other artists who have used their facilities have included Anish Kapoor and Anthony Gormley, but the centre has also given residencies to well known ceramicists like Ewen Henderson and Philip Eglin (Reijnders 2005: 10). *Laibe* was one of many works produced during Cragg's residencies, where one of the technicians threw particular shapes according to his instructions and then Cragg manipulated the resulting forms in different ways (Geitner 2002: 23).

Photographs of him working at the EKWC depict him actively manipulating materials as well as directing and discussing the possibilities of technique and material with others. This use of people with an intimate hands-on knowledge of a material by a crafts practitioner, designer or artist is a continental way of realizing projects. Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands have developed this manner of working in industry since the 1920s, and indeed one of the

aims of the EKWC is to strengthen the bonds between ceramics, industry, science and education (Geitner 2002: 12).

In England though, this is less common. Craft practitioners typically work with a narrow range of materials and know them well, but artists have moved away from this deep knowledge and frequently use whatever materials seem relevant to their intentions, without necessarily worrying about artisan skills. Cragg's sculptures incorporate glass, ceramics, metals, plastics, wood and many other materials, so that it would not be possible to become a master of all. Like other artists of the 1990s, like Tracy Emin or Sarah Lucas, he incorporated traditional craft materials according to the intended message. However, unlike them, he was not trying to blur the distinctions between art and life. His themes might be about particular everyday elements, but they were not subjective, intended to shock or just suggest the contemporary. Indeed, the application for his residency at the EKWC stated that he wanted to give the materials 'more meaning, mythology and poetry' (Geitner 2002: 46). The skills used were there to create ambiguities and tensions, to suggest past and present, to complicate rather than to describe.

Skill is a factor that has caused rifts in both craft and fine art over the last few decades. Sculpture has always had less status than painting because of the physical labour involved as well as the fact that so many sculptors traditionally trained with artisans. Even

between the 1950s and 1970s, when new materials were being incorporated, many sculptors, like Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler and Lynn Chadwick, expanded their education beyond art schools by learning welding at classes run by British Oxygen for workers in the building trade (Garlake 2008: 51–62). However, skill in itself has ideologies within different artistic genres and different eras. The obvious hand-made qualities of products designed by William Morris were a subversive stance against capitalism, where the deskilling of workers in factories through mechanization was a key factor in production. Skill was used in modernist art not for displays of virtuosity, but as a means of linking maker to object and for critiquing material. However, more recently these skills have been subdued by a desire to move beyond the studio to situations and discourses not traditionally associated with art. Much contemporary art is suspicious of objects and self expression, with the practice of art operating across formal, cultural and spatial boundaries. With the artist frequently acting as entrepreneur, artistic skill is demonstrated through conceptual acuity (Roberts 2007: 3 and 11).

With the return of Cragg and other British sculptors to a real engagement with material in order to create objects – even if this does call on the skills of others – craft, with a small c, becomes implicated in the making of meaning. As Grayson Perry has stated, the ceramic pots that he makes represent a stand against so much contemporary

art, which is not sensuous. Rather than the object being a prop for an idea; 'the hand made object speaks the language of the body, and if we only engage with our heads then we are denying a huge part of the vocabulary' (Buck 2002: 100).

During the 1970s and 1980s there was also a rift in craft between those with traditional artisan skills and those who have been through higher education. This came to a head in 1982, when Michael Brennand-Wood both exhibited in and curated a Crafts Council touring exhibition entitled *Fabric and Form: New Textile Art from Britain*. In the November/December issue of *Crafts* this exhibition was reviewed, with Peter Fuller arguing that the exhibition was an example of 'the decadence of Council subsidized fashions' (Fuller 1982: 43–44), which he felt had already played havoc with the nation's painting and sculpture. He felt that this sort of work represented the breakdown of textile practice and of the special skills and knowledge associated with it. Michael Brennand-Wood's reply was that skill and tradition had not been forgotten, but now textiles no longer needed to be linked to function, to be tasteful, soft or flexible (Brennand-Wood 1982: 44–45).

A similar argument was considered in 1991 by the ceramicist Alison Britton, who in answer to a call by Peter Dormer and David Pye for recognition of the value of traditional skills and forms, also said that crafts could not be nostalgic. She argued that while technical skills formed a basis, the most important thing was going beyond those and

making something appropriate for the contemporary world. 'What I would define as our main responsibility is the skilful achievement of relevance' (Britton 1991). Her sculptural vessels of the time were hand built, which allowed her to combine asymmetrical elements and create unusual surfaces and through those means, to reference and articulate particular ideas.

Vessel

In a recent discussion with Edward Allington (June 2009), who is a sculptor of the same generation as Cragg and the New British Sculptors, and who has also made many metaphorical vessels, he claimed that the rich use of the vessel form from the 1980s onwards in sculpture owes much to ceramics and dates back to the artists' student days. Allington started his career as a ceramicist. Deacon is married to Jacqueline Poncelet, who was a ceramicist. Cragg has known a number of ceramicists since being a student. Gormley, Cragg and Kapoor have all spent time at the EKWC, and since 1999 Deacon has spent much time working with the ceramicist Niels Dietrich in Cologne (Kolberg 2003: 14).

Although Cragg, like the sculptors Alison Wilding and Richard Deacon and the ceramicists Alison Britton and Elizabeth Fritch, studied at the RCA during the 1970s, where the separate courses were taught within small independent departmental units, the students from across the disciplines did meet (Frayling 1987: 144). The Royal

College of Art opened its doors to 'aspiring artists, designers, studio potters and sculptors using ceramic materials' in the 1960s, and when there was increased disenchantment with design during the 1970s, many of these ceramic students opted for what has been called a 'para-art activity' (Harrod 1999: 371). Although the structures of galleries, journals and museums have tended to keep the consumption of craft and sculpture separate, certain ideas are relevant at particular times. One of these is the vessel and its metaphorical richness. The ceramicist Edmund de Waal has written that:

Clay vessels are among the earliest known objects made by humans. Actual containers of food, water, wood or ashes, the mundane and the precious, they have also always been on the threshold of symbolic activities and rituals. They have been used to tell stories and express poetry [...]. Historically and culturally resonant, they are as full of possibilities as ever. (de Waal 1999: 74)

Beyond these metaphors, vessels are also rich in the ability to suggest the experience of the world. The metalworker Michael Rowe, for instance, has discussed vessels as fundamental to human existence and, reflecting his interest in architecture, his vessels respond to some of these concerns. 'We live and move in a world of containers, we put things into containers, we contain things and we ourselves are contained [...] forms within forms' (Bond 1973: 22). In

addition they are containers that have an inside and outside, that both occupies and contains space, and through this defines emptiness as presence (Daintry 2007: 9). It is all of these aspects that give the form such enduring resonance. Through considering any of these aspects both sculptors and crafts practitioners are linking their practice to the roots of humanity. It is here that sculptural practice and that of crafts come very close.

This interest in using the vessel form as a means of expression, to create something to look at and that was relevant to the contemporary world as well as reaching back through time, was a common thread in all of the work shown at the 1991 exhibition of ceramicists *The Sculptural Vessel* (Houston: 1991). In this they were similar to the intentions of Cragg at the time. In his essay for the exhibition catalogue, John Houston argued that the role of the vessel in crafts in the post-industrial era is complex as it is a fundamental, timeless and archetypal prop of civilization, and yet its preciousness has been debased through mechanization. In order to give it new meaning, contemporary ceramicists had looked beyond craft traditions to ideas related to architecture, sculpture and painting (Houston 1991: 12). Like the metal vessels of Michael Rowe, for instance, many ceramicists at that time were considering ideas related to deconstructivism, with fractured elements and complex relationships of interior space to exterior form. These aspects were conscious

disruptions of the single gesture, raised pot, and their built forms not only created those that were unfamiliar, but also removed the possibility of function and the associated sense of everyday touch.

Cragg has stated that he does not like people to touch his work as he thinks that the eye can take in information at a distance, whereas touch obscures meaning (Schulz-Hoffmann 2003: 296). Clearly touch and sight are very different senses, with touch, both for the maker and user, being related to particular objects, and sight having the ability to give an overview and context. However, bread and vessels, which are implicated in *Laibe*, are the most tactile of human objects. While objects are in themselves instrumental in the formation of consciousness, having the ability to give a sense of separation from the world, they also stimulate remembering (Kwint et al. 1999: 2). The deep knowledge of the feel of ceramics that all humans have; the ability to empathetically trace the makers' finger marks on the surface, together with the long history of cultural resonances, give the material a special place in understanding. Bread, which everyone has eaten, is handled and crumbled in the hands, accompanies meals, and gives sustenance. As Cragg has stated, each material has specific qualities which provides a rich vocabulary in the language of objects (Cragg 1985: 60). The simultaneous incorporation of subject and metaphor with material increases the suggestive possibilities. These are the means that Cragg uses to re-

engage the audience with their man-made environment, a relationship that he believes has been lost in the post industrial world with the emphasis on image and desire.

Other artists working in ceramics, like Grayson Perry, use the proliferation of imagery as a source, and subvert the decadence portrayed through using the vessel form. The very unassuming nature of the vessel, with pretty shiny glazes and colours attracts the viewer into looking, while the imagery repels. Unlike Cragg, it is not the timelessness of the vessel or the material itself that attracts, but the surface available on the apparently docile domestic object that provides a vehicle for illustrating the underside of contemporary life. However, for Cragg, as well as Wilding, Kapoor and Deacon, it is the material, process, and form that help to suggest metaphor.

Cragg frequently creates a tension between the past and present within his work. For many craft makers, this is frequently revealed through the vessel form, and through surface and material, but for sculptors this can cover many areas of practice. Richard Long, for instance, has used the artistic walk as a means of exploring apparently unmediated terrain, in a way that suggests both early man and contemporary mapping. He is only one of many who have explored this type of practice. (Tony Cragg went on an artistic walk along Hadrian's Wall with Hamish Fulton, Richard Long and the ceramicist Jenny Beavan in the 1970s (Beavan interview, April 2006).

However, the use of the vessel form gives this suggestion of past and present particular resonances. Much of what we understand about previous cultures comes from shards of vessels that offer glimpses into preparing foods and performing rituals. Clearly archaeology, craft, and art are not the same things. An exhibition in 1991 entitled *From Art to Archaeology*, which featured the work of Richard Long amongst others, discussed those differences. Archaeology is the study of past human experience that is understood through digging up cultural artefacts that have been accreted through layers of the earth. Art does not search for that scientific understanding – although Cragg does frequently include references to scientific study – but where the two disciplines meet is where a pattern has been spotted and corresponds to what touched the creator (Chippendale 1991: 40 and 43). These aspects have been fundamental both within craft and art ceramics.

With the return of Cragg to studio based work in the early 1990s, when he was experimenting with clay; ideas around humanness, archaeology, and ritual were being explored within different areas of the fine arts. In addition, studio ceramics were frequently using the vessel as an initiating point to develop new forms and sculptural ideas. *Laibe*, with its rich possibilities of interpretation that incorporates the past in the present and the universal aspects of human survival within the ceramic vessel form, lies at the heart of these complex and overlapping areas of practice.

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